

Dunscore Digest

Dunscore Church and Community Magazine Spring 2021

Minister's Musing

Mark Smith

The day after we published our plans for worship in January everything changed!

No more gathering in church together meant a quick re-vamp of our plans. It's hard to keep up to date and impossible to anticipate when things will change again and that makes life very stressful for all of us. Uncertainty over jobs, income, health, and distant family members will take its toll.

We look forward to lockdown easing – going to places, meeting friends again. We look forward to Spring – the snowdrops make us smile in anticipation.

We look forward to Easter – eggs at the ready!

BUT ... first comes Lent!

LENT is a 'penitential' season and sounds like hard work just when we don't need it! Giving up all kinds of nice stuff is daunting, especially when we are denied so much at the moment. However, we know there will be benefits – detoxing our bodies, losing the Christmas flab, re-focussing our lives in preparation for the Spring and Summer ahead. Rather than giving up, I try to see it as a time to re-boot and re-assess. A chance to change things which are dragging us down, which block us from receiving God's Love fully. A chance to be renewed, ready to meet our friends, enjoy the world around us, and even be closer to God.

Then comes ... GOOD FRIDAY!

Remembering what Jesus did for each of us in the drama of arrest, torture, death, and burial.

Then comes ... EASTER!

The joy of new life, eternal life, breaking out of the tomb – a joyous celebration of what God's Love for YOU has achieved. Why not thank Him by using Lent to ask Him to be in your life amidst the chaos and uncertainty?

Better than any Easter Egg!

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Editor's Footnote

Matthew Aitken

A year ago I was prompted to make the print copy of the Digest into an "easy-to-print" layout (rather than booklet form) as it was shorter due to Covid and didn't really merit professional printing. Maybe we'll keep going with it this way. If you're reading the print version, what do you think? One down-side is that the Church Elders have to print the copies that they distribute. Sorry Elders!

A significant benefit is that we save the printing cost. This is a saving of £360 a year (roughly 50p an issue) - the equivalent of a good fund-raising event.

Holy Week Diary

Services and Events Leading Up to Easter

Sunday 28 March - Palm Sunday

10:30am on Zoom **Messy Church Special**

3:00 pm "Live" **Prayer & Reflection** in St Ninian's Church, Moniaive

7:00 pm "Live" **Prayer & Reflection** in Dunscore Church

Wednesday 31 March

From 6:00 am **Lenten Meditation** on YouTube

Thursday 1 April – Maundy Thursday

7:00 pm on Zoom **The Last Supper**

Friday 2 April – Good Friday

9:00 am to 4:00 pm on the hour on YouTube '**At The Cross**'

10:30am "Live" **Hour at the Cross** in Dunscore Church

2:00 pm "Live" **Hour at the Cross** in St Ninian's Church, Moniaive

Sunday 4 April – Easter Day

10:30 am on Zoom with Easter Service with 'live stream' organ & Coffee + Egg Break!

3:00 pm "Live" **Easter Eggstravaganza** in St Ninian's Church, Moniaive

Zoom and YouTube links will be in the Church Family Notices, church emails, website and Facebook. Contact Matthew at auchenage@gmail.com to be added to the email list.

Online Sunday services are at 10:30 am each week on Zoom (at least until we are allowed back in the church). The link is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86939887756> and you can join any time from 10:15 am.

Thank You

Debbie Smith

We had a Mothering Sunday and Thank You online service recently. As part of this, Debbie read this poem:

It seems an age since moving into the Manse,
And for a "thank you" gathering there has been no chance.

So many challenges this year we have seen,
Lockdown, isolation, and winter have been.

Given though some grey clouds loom,
The flowers are now beginning to bloom.

So as Spring now raises her head,

Hopefully giving joy as you leap out of bed!

Mark and I on this Mothering Sunday would like to say:

"Thank you" to all who have helped in our stay.

Back on the Bus

Geoff Creamer

With the promised easing of travel restrictions from 26th April, CVCT will resume its fortnightly Moniaive to Castle Douglas service from Thursday 29th April (thereafter 13th, 27th May; 10th, 24th June; 8th, 22nd July etc.), leaving from Moniaive (the Cross) at 11:15 am and travelling via Kirkland, Wallacetown, Dunscore, Newtonairds, Shawhead and arriving at Castle Douglas at 12:05 pm. The return journey leaves Castle Douglas at 15:05 pm, arriving back at Moniaive at 15:55 pm.

We will be required to operate under current distancing measures and therefore with reduced passenger-carrying capacity. Intending passengers are therefore strongly advised to book their seats in advance with me on 01848 330821 or 07702 915071 or geoff.creamer@outlook.com. Passengers are reminded that they are required to wear face masks while travelling on the bus, and that the wearing of seat-belts is mandatory.

It is hoped that, as things begin to open up, we will be able to offer some excursions, but it is not possible to plan any kind of programme until the situation becomes clearer. Once we are able to offer any trips, the details will be advertised on our website www.cvct.org.uk and elsewhere locally.

I am always pleased to receive any enquiries from local groups and organisations about hiring the bus and as a non-profit operation our charges are very modest: £8 for up to 6 hours, plus 50p per mile. Hires for 6 to 10 hours are charged at £17, and for 10 to 24 hours at £27, with the same mileage rate. Any group not already affiliated to CVCT will simply be asked to complete a basic form which outlines our conditions of hire. There is no fee for doing this.

The bus exists as a community asset, and while we thank everyone who uses it for your continuing support we would like to encourage those of you who have not yet explored its benefits to take advantage of our services. The more the bus is used the more we can try to develop the range of services that may be possible. We hope to see you all soon!

Linking up with Connect John Drabble

The Dunscore Connect Bible Study and Discussion group has continued to meet at 7.30 pm on Thursday evenings via Zoom to encourage each other and enlighten our faith.

Recently we have been studying the Book of the prophet Daniel, a man of remarkable courage, faith and insight who has some pretty weird visions. Learning what these visions might mean has been a revelation.

I have always been a little sceptical about the value of the Old Testament but have been delighted to learn that it has so much to tell us about living in our present society.

The group is particularly adept at laughing and going off on wild tangents; we often have to be brought back in line by the hapless discussion leader who is trying to get through a series of crunchy questions.

Those of us who wish to, take turns in preparing and leading the evenings under the watchful and very helpful eye of Rev Tim.

I thoroughly recommend these evenings and would encourage anyone to come and join us. Why not give it a try – you will be surprised!

Pre-School Stride On Lee Mackenzie

Dunscore Preschool Centre continues to thrive, despite the restrictions that the current pandemic has placed upon everyone's lives. Indeed, we have never been busier, and now have 19 children attending the centre with a further two children due to join us in April.

The suspension of early learning and childcare provision for all but vulnerable children and the children of key workers again in January, provided challenges for us all. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank parents for their support and understanding. Whilst juggling working from home and childcare, every single family engaged with our activities. This not only helped their children continue their learning but also to have continuity with staff and peers, so that when we were allowed to reopen in February, the children settled well. Thank you Dunscore Preschool parents you are amazing! Thank you also to our hard-working staff who have done their best to support the children and their families during these challenging times.

We continued to care for about a third of our children at the centre, while providing a combination of learning resources for those children at home. We developed learning packs and provided craft resources and activities, stories, challenges, science experiments, music, PE, and show and tell sessions via online platforms. We had a different theme for each week – ice, space, Scots, number ninjas and feeling good. The children and their families shared their learning at home with us through videos and photos, showing us their home-made ice creams, bird feeders, rockets, Scottish song lyrics and amazing craft to name but a few. Staff kept in regular contact with the children and their families, phoning and video calling to keep in touch.

We are trying to get outdoors as much as possible, and visit the woods and park to play, learn and explore most days, and usually get wet and muddy! As we now have so many more children, we have sadly had to send croccy to an early retirement. As you may know if you have seen us out and about, croccy is the walking aid we use to help keep the children safe on the road. We now have two new walking snakes, although after more than 10 years of saying 'croccy', it's hard to now say 'snake'. Needless to say, the children keep us right! We also have some new high visibility tabards, which don't come off easily when we are walking along the road. We are all definitely looking forward to Spring and Summer and drier, warmer weather.

Charity Choices

Alison Boyes

Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts

In March 2020, my son Luke was working at the Sheraton Hotel in Edinburgh. His summer job with the YMCA in the US was due to start in May, and he had just been to Belfast for his interview. Suddenly, all that changed. The summer job was cancelled and the Sheraton furloughed all its workers and in January 2021 made many (including Luke) redundant.



The Covid pandemic changed the way we live, work, and think about our lives. Lewis MacLachlan, originally from Dumfries but now working as a chef in Edinburgh, saw with dismay what was happening in the hospitality industry, with chefs laid off and surplus food from restaurants and suppliers going to waste. At the same time, he was acutely aware that increasing numbers of people in the city were going hungry. In response to this, in April 2020, he set up the charity "Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts". With help from crowdfunding, he secured premises in Leith Theatre and set about recruiting volunteers - not only chefs but also people to serve, pack and deliver food and do admin.

EKFH serves hot meals twice a day outside the theatre but also makes up day packs which comprise breakfast, lunch, dinner and treats. These packs are delivered all over the city by an army of volunteers in cars or bicycles. The food is all free and no questions are asked; Lewis is passionate about this, as stated on the website: "We are charitable in nature, but our actions are from a standpoint of respect and solidarity, not pity or saviorism". The charity also lobbies politicians on food poverty issues, saying "we will never accept hunger as a way of life"

The meals are tasty, healthy and cooked by professional chefs. In the beginning, EKFH was serving 4,000 a week, now they are sending out 1,400 daily meal packs as well as feeding 100+ people twice a day outside the theatre.

With so much time on his hands, Luke was looking for a way to be useful, and now volunteers with EKFH to pack food and deliver it on his bike. He has been really impressed with the organisation and by the commitment of everyone involved. It has been satisfying for him to gain valuable volunteering experience while feeling that he is doing something so worthwhile. There are over 500 volunteers who come from all walks of life, brought together by shared values.

The charity is set to move soon to new premises given to them by Edinburgh City Council. The demand for its services has been steadily growing throughout the pandemic, but Lewis hopes that this will not go on forever: "Our ultimate goal is to be put out of business because the hunger crisis is thoroughly addressed by government support agencies and improved supply chain issues. Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts does not intend to simply become part of the 'poverty industry' but rather to strive for a solution to these challenges"

If you would like to learn more about EKFH, have a look at their website www.emptykitchens.co.uk or visit their Facebook page.

On a beautiful first day of Spring I decided it was time to start the daily morning walks. To say it was a joy was an understatement, the ground covered in hard sparkling frost, the sun shining, clear blue skies. Birds galore singing they were buzzing all over the place, blackbirds, a pair of thrushes, blue tits, a little pack of goldfinches, a pair of ducks flew overhead and there were a couple of mallards in a garden on the way to Throughgate. Eight geese on the wee loch, a buzzard sitting on the telephone wire, robins, scores of crows and then a cock pheasant took off right in front of me. A joy to be alive!

Alas, this glorious morning was spoiled by the amount of litter picked up on this short 40 minute walk. From an empty vodka bottle to cigarette packets and an empty vape bottle. What can we do? Of course this problem seems to be everywhere. I recently had to go the Lochar Moss recycling depot and driving down the A76 from Auldgrith to Dumfries the litter is indescribable. Although parts of it were cleared earlier this year, coming out from the depot there was litter right along the roadside.

Perhaps we (the Eco Group – is anyone else interested?) could work with Councils, "Keep Scotland Beautiful" and other bodies to address 'How to STOP people throwing out their litter (and worse)'. In a recent weekly Bulletin from D & G Council there was a photo of Dumfries & Galloway Council Streetscene cleaning up the A75 from Lochfoot roundabout to Cairnryan and over a few days they collected 1,085 bags, weighing 5.7 tonnes of rubbish. At a cost to you and me - who knows?

The country is recovering from COVID and soon we hope to welcome visitors to our beautiful countryside, preferably litter-free. In Kent, a trial is to be rolled out using AI software to match footage of motorists throwing rubbish to their number plates and getting an automatic fine of £90. Maybe D & G Council will follow suit? In the meantime dear readers, can we all take a reusable / recyclable bag when walking to pick up litter? I know, you didn't put it there but others may copy our actions, whether we walk in town, villages or the countryside – anywhere!

This year our first Eco Meeting was held in January and the next one is on 30th March. Anyone interested in joining us is very welcome! Hopefully soon we can start our Litter Larks monthly litter pick followed by coffee / empire biscuits - COVID permitting.

Cop26 is being held in Glasgow in November this year and world leaders will be there to discuss climate change, achieving "net zero" etc. and there will be many online meetings preceding this event. Eco Congregation Scotland hosts many and the most recent one at the start of March was very interesting with people from many countries attending on Zoom. If you would like to be added to their email list, you can find the link at: www.ecocongregationscotland.org.

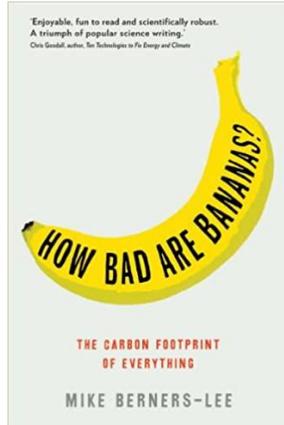
P.S. The one bag of rubbish on Monday became four by Thursday and on Friday I collected a whole black bin bag picked up a few yards from the roadside behind a fence.

Here's to a wonderful Spring, a happy Easter, safe days and a quiet way back to normality and meeting friends and family.

How Bad are Bananas? Kath Aitken

This is a nicely written, easy read by Mike Berners-Lee who is a well-respected Lancaster University professor.

His research includes working out the carbon footprints of many consumables and instances. From bananas and water to war and travel and all sorts in between. The book highlights that our impact on the world is a very complex issue and the subject is most certainly not black and white. There is something for everyone in this book and even the most informed environmentalist will learn many things.



I would offer to lend the copy we have read but it belongs, in true, reduce, recycle, reuse style, to a friend!

Spoiler alert from the Digest Editor. The answer to the title question is "not bad".

Bird of the Season Lesley Creamer

The Dunnock

Let's take a look at one of our absolute classic LBJs (little brown jobs!). At first sight they're so little and brown you might overlook them completely or dismiss them as sparrows. A closer look reveals rich brown upper parts with a streaky back and wings and streaks on the flanks. Apart from a brown crown, the head and breast are blue-grey. This is the Dunnock which hides a really lively lifestyle behind that veneer of ordinariness and homeliness. It's all about sex of course!

Many birds have multiple partners, the combination of one sex with two or more of the opposite sex (polygamy). The Dunnock, however, caused the creation of a new dictionary word as a result of its sexual activities – polygynandry, a combination of polygyny (one male with multiple mates) and polyandry (one female with multiple mates)! But these aren't quick flings – more like the setting up of mixed-sex harems within formalised marriages! All done in the interest of producing successful broods of healthy chicks to expand the family tree. And plenty of males around to help with all the boring duties that go with having a young family!

Watch out for the shenanigans involved in setting up these complicated domestic arrangements in your garden now!



Church Accounting Robert Waugh

We may have had to cancel our Stated Annual Meeting due to the present circumstances but it's not all bad news!

Despite the lockdowns, as a Church we have adapted and kept active throughout the past difficult year and thus have lessened the impact of the pandemic. Our annual accounts which include details of our achievements and performance show the resilience of the Church community. The financial report and the accounts themselves mirror this positive picture.

But don't just take my word for it, have a look yourself. The accounts make riveting reading! Please take a look. I will be happy to send you a copy of the accounts and answer any questions you may have. You can contact me by email on: craigeller@hotmail.co.uk or phone on: 01387 820301

Dunscore Gets Gardening Andi Martin

I moved to Dunscore in August 2020, in the midst of the pandemic. The thing that caught my eye when I arrived was that so many people had fantastic and beautiful gardens. A second thing that I found out was there was a fabulous community spirit here. Now I have been here for six months, I thought I would find out if there was something where the two things could be combined and after a quick check, I was gobsmacked to find out that there was no gardening groups in the community. So this is something that I feel the community would enjoy and benefit from.

So where to start?

Well, we still have the pandemic but are on the road back to normality, so we will have to start virtually. So I have set up a [Facebook group](#) for Dunscore and the surrounding areas to join in. This will be for us to share photos, videos, questions, ideas and general gardening chit-chat showcasing what we are up to and giving others the opportunity to share in your gardening adventures.

Once Covid restrictions are eased, it would be good for us to move from the virtual group to a meet-up group. My idea is that each of us can host a garden tour, offering local people the opportunity to meet up, tour your garden spaces, share a cuppa and a chat and generally build up the gardening community of Dunscore. I have been privileged that locals have shared plants with me (thank you Hilary, Keith, Kirsten and Andrew), offered advice and generally gave me inspiration to develop my mature garden to the next level. I feel now I want to share this with the local community and to get ideas from other in what I can do in the future.

The Facebook group is open to everyone so please do join, share your photos, etc and let's get this community gardening group going.

At the time of writing, the Facebook group had 36 members – growing every day!

Loch Urr Cycle

Colin Mitchell

This a very pleasant 21 mile circular cycle from Dunscore. It passes through varied countryside with some hills to ascend. There is lots of wildlife to see on the route. Birds include skylark, meadow pipit, pied wagtail, wheatear, kestrel, buzzard, red kite, cuckoo, dipper, swallow, swift, willow warbler, chiffchaff and stonechat. Mammals include roe deer, hare, rabbit, stoat and fox.

THE ROUTE

1. Leave Dunscore from the Church and go down the Black Brae and over Dalgonar Bridge.
2. Continue to Milton and turn right passing various roads leading to farms including Chapel, Nethertown and Drumshangan. Cross the bridge just past the Bogrie road and continue past Sundaywell where the road climbs for a short distance. *Sundaywell was probably built by James Kirko about the middle of the 17th Century, now forming part of a modern farm-house. He was executed in Dumfries as a covenanter.*
3. Soon you will come to a road to the right with a cattle grid. Take this road which climbs to the Shillingland road end. Continue straight on over a cattle grid with a mobile phone mast on your left. *You will pass the remains of a building on your left before Shillingland road end. This was the farm of "Muttonhole". The occupant had the reputation as a sheep stealer.*
4. The road now descends past the Craigenvey road end and continues over Craigenvey Moor. *In the summer there are lots of orchids on the left of the road.*
5. Continue past Lochurr farm entrance and you will see Loch Urr to your left. *The Loch often holds ducks, geese, cormorant and swans.*
6. Continue on through a gate on the road to a road junction. Turn left.
7. This part of the route gives wonderful views of Loch Urr before descending into an area of forestry with a new plantation on the right. *The man-made island you can see on the far side of the loch is the remains of a crannog.*
8. The road winds south past Waterhead, Monybuie and over a bridge over the Moneybuie Burn.
9. Do not take the road to the right but continue past Drumwhirn Farm and take the next road to the left and pass over the River Urr on the Glaisters Bridge
10. Uphill now to the road junction and turn left. The road gently climbs through forestry and start to descend with the entrance to Craigenputtock on the left. *In the spring cuckoos can be heard calling in this area. Thomas Carlyle lived here.*
11. Continue straight on until you cross a cattle grid.
12. Here the road descends quickly. Take care of potholes and any traffic
13. You will soon pass the junction you took to go to Loch Urr.
14. Continue by your outward route back to Dunscore.

Colin's sketch of the route is shown to the right.

You must be aware that we are soon to have elections to the Scottish Parliament. Are there any questions that you would like to ask the candidates? The Dunscore Church Eco Group is organising an Eco hustings event on Tuesday 20 April at 7:30 pm on Zoom and all the main candidates will be there.

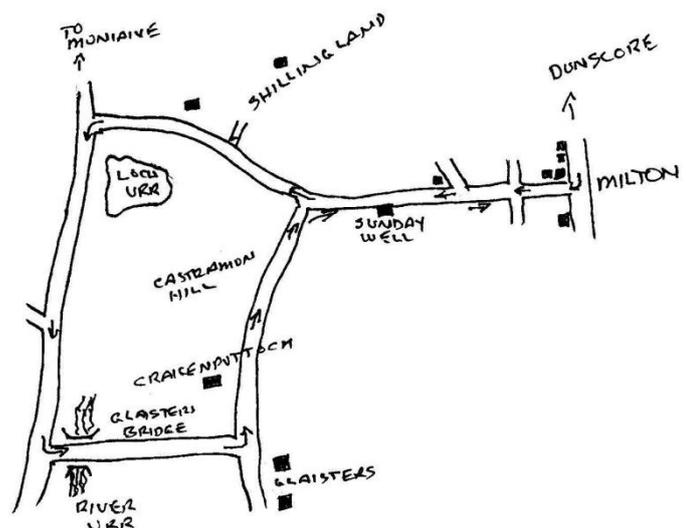
Keep a look out for more details very soon

A Hug for Stella

Stella McCubbin died on 2nd February 2021. She will be hugely missed by all who knew and loved her. Stella loved hugs. Think about her and remember her with a smile as you read this poem:

It's wondrous what a hug can do
 A hug can cheer you when you're blue.
 A hug can say, "I love you so"
 Or, "Gee, I hate to see you go"
 A hug is, "Welcome back again"
 And, "Great to see you! Where've you been?"
 A hug can soothe a small child's pain
 And bring a rainbow after rain.
 The hug! There's just no doubt about it,
 We scarcely could survive without it.
 A hug delights and warms and charms,
 It must be why God gave us arms.
 Hugs are great for fathers and mothers,
 Sweet for sisters, swell for brothers.
 And chances are, your favourite aunts
 Love them more than potted plants.
 Kittens crave them, puppies love them.
 Heads of State are not above them
 A hug can break the language barrier,
 And make your travels so much merrier.
 No need to fret about your store of 'em
 Whatever you do there's always more of 'em.
 So spread those arms without delay,
 And give someone a hug today!

Thanks to Pam for asking us to include this.



Jane Haining in Schools Pam Mitchell

For 30 years Dunscore has been involved with hosting young students from Hungary who have been to visit the village of Jane Haining. These students have all won a Hungarian schools competition based on Jane's life. The students have learned about the Scottish lady who worked among Jewish children from 1932 and in refusing to leave them, sacrificed her life in 1944 in the horrors of Auschwitz. School children in Hungary know all about her.

Not so in Scotland. In particular, outwith Dumfries and Galloway, few school children will have heard of Jane Haining. But this is about to change! A project is being launched to raise awareness of Jane's story and through this to encourage people to stand up against oppression of others on the basis of race or religion. A starting point may be to initiate a pilot essay writing competition for Scottish school pupils probably targeted at P6/7 or S1/2. I have volunteered to become involved with this Scottish Remembering Jane Haining Steering Group. I will let you know how it develops!

Lubuto Link

Andy Barr

The new minister at Lubuto, Zambia, Rev Friday Sinkonde, will be officially inducted on 11th April. He has plans for the Church in Lubuto and is so very appreciative of the connection with the Dunscore and Moniaive Churches and wider communities.

At the moment one priority is the buying of a replacement minibus. This will enable members of the community to make essential journeys such as attending funerals or taking clothes or other essentials to needy people. The bus will also be hired out to provide income for its maintenance and other benefits.



Gifts for distribution to the needy

Even though many have, materially, very little compared to us in Dunscore they still manage to help those in greater need. Rev Sinkonde wrote recently in an email to me "Please do everything possible within your powers to help us. We will greatly appreciate any help from Dunscore that works to reduce our suffering".

That is a plea that YOU can take to your heart as YOU read these words. YOU can do something very simple this minute to "reduce suffering". YOU can ring me now on 07765887349 or email me at andybarrcards@btinternet.com. YOU will discover how YOU can make a one off donation, "Sponsor a Seat", set up a standing order, become a patron, or make a contribution in many other ways. YOU can contact me this second and YOUR contribution large or small will help in, and give real hope to, the church and community of Lubuto in a matter of days.

Lots on Board

Kath Aitken

At the Church Board meetings we review the various activities we are tasked with. Despite all the necessary restrictions caused by Covid 19 it is remarkable what we have achieved. We thought you might like to see a summary.

The manse was redecorated and, after Mark's induction as our new minister, we were delighted when he and Debbie were able to move into their new home. Zoom services were instigated extremely quickly and we have enjoyed all our services using this medium, most recently this has included post service break-out rooms for coffee and banter. For the short period that they are allowed, we had some quiet, reflective services in the Church (complying with the many Covid rules).

We celebrated Advent and Christmas in inventive ways, notably the Messy Church Team arranged Christingle In A Bag and a fantastic video nativity.

We have improved the link with our sister congregation in Lubuto and strengthened our bond with our friends in the St Ninian's, Moniaive.

We have increased our eco-credentials, let's face it who hasn't this year?! We have even managed some excellent fund-raising activities.

You may have heard the Church bells being rung a couple of times in the last 12 months. Once was during advent and the second time was to celebrate the banning of the use of nuclear bombs by the UN, a truly momentous agreement.

As a Church we have welcomed other community groups to use our Zoom facility and have happily allowed the Community Council to link into our Church electricity supply to keep the village defibrillator in good working order.

So, never a dull moment in our Church community and none of the above would be possible without the skills and dedication of our Church members. We are here to serve and to spread God's word and love. All are welcome.

Live from the Church Matthew Aitken

It seems that we should be able to hold services in the church building again soon. Sadly, we won't be back to normal immediately as, in the short-term at least, there will probably be a need for social distancing, wearing masks and no singing. But for many people actually being in the building is very important and it will be a great day when we are allowed back.

With restricted numbers allowed and some with medical or mobility concerns, not everyone can be in church from day one. As a consequence, we intend to live-stream services to YouTube so that everyone can enjoy the service, some in the church building and some at home.

The link for this will be shared widely nearer the time (when we have worked out how to do it!) but if you want to be sure that you are on the list, just let me know. The link for services before we return is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86939887756>.

Return of the Native? Annette Cosens

I wonder if you are familiar with the image of the 'impertinent' young red squirrel, Squirrel Nutkin, punting across the glassy surface of Derwentwater on a twig raft with his brother and cousins in Beatrix Potter's 1903 publication? His destination is Owl Island and a visit to the revered tawny owl, Old Brown. It doesn't go well for the little fellow, though for this he is entirely responsible.

Even if you are unfamiliar with the tale (he loses his tail rather violently) you may anyway have an affection and/or concern for our native, and still local, red squirrels - who are in much publicised trouble in our area, in Scotland in general, and in the few remaining mainland territories in England and Northern Ireland - but this time not through any fault of their own.

Once there were an estimated 3.5 million reds in the UK, now there are less than 120,000 with only 15,000 of these south of the Border.

The ongoing threats to their existence are multiple but, to précis, it's the usual suspects of habitat loss combined with disease and the spread of a non-native species, the grey squirrel, introduced in tiny numbers in about 30 locations as a novelty species in the late 19th century from North America. The greys love it here and many people here understandably love them too, but they've devastated our native red squirrel population, though not single-handedly of course. We're the main villains in this unfortunate pantomime.

Grey squirrels are wonderful: intelligent, resourceful, entertaining and beautiful. They're also successful, but so much so that their numbers are contributing to the relatively swift extinction of our once numerous native reds. How?

Firstly, the greys carry squirrel parapoxvirus, a virus which is deadly to the reds yet seemingly harmless to the greys. Where the virus is present in the grey population, it is quickly transmitted to the reds, via saliva as they forage the same territories, and the speed at which the red population decreases to unsustainable levels is reportedly 17-25 times faster than it would be by competition for resources alone. A red squirrel becomes ill and dies slowly in a pretty unpleasant way within a fortnight of contracting the squirrel pox virus.

Secondly, the grey squirrels are larger so require more food resources. They have a tolerance to the tannins in unripe acorns (reds don't) and have often eaten this important resource before they ripen, thus, in mainly broadleaved woodlands, leaving insufficient for the reds to eat or store for over-wintering. They also help themselves to red squirrel food caches, adding to the pressure on the reds with many of them 50-85%, the young in particular, starving over the winter or being 'pushed' out into less productive woodlands, if those alternatives exist at all for those squirrels. This another factor working against them: our dwindling woodlands - felled, degraded and fragmented en masse by mechanised human activities over the past century ... then cats, dogs, stoats and raptors completing the carnage.

In case you're reaching for the Esc key, I must hastily include some positive points:

Lots of people care deeply about the plight of red squirrels and some have translated this love and concern for them by taking steps to help create an environment where they can regain lost territories and maintain their numbers.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has run a campaign for several years called Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk - its website enables and encourages anyone to report sightings of reds and greys, dead or alive, and any ill-looking reds. These helpful reports by the public identified a red squirrel with squirrel pox at Routen Bridge in 2020 and also up at Glenkiln where reds were once prolific but now more or less absent. Recording your sightings (including date and location) of both reds and greys helps SSRS focus its grey squirrel control activities more effectively and economically and has led to real advances in helping target resources and maintain red squirrel populations, though the effort needed is constant.

There are also two active, constituted, local groups of volunteers: Mid and Lower Nithsdale which have initially been supported by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and these volunteers are active in different ways throughout the year helping to protect the local red population. Grey numbers have been impacted and reds have returned in some areas so volunteering is really worthwhile, however much a volunteer contributes. Contact with these groups can be made via the SSRS website. Importantly, there are also knowledgeable, diligent and dedicated individuals operating independently in the area to help the reds, not to forget our native Pine Martens making a comeback here and tackling the greys, so we are all - man and beast - doing our best, rather against the odds, to turn the tables for our precious native species.

Communions Past

Roy Spence

Recently the Dunscore and Glencairn Congregations held a communion service online, it made me wonder what these services were like in the past.

In the Dunscore Congregation the communion lasted over five days. The "Fast Day" was on the Thursday with a service, Friday was a thinking day, a preparative service was held on the Saturday, communion proper on the Sunday and a thanksgiving service on the Monday.

Only the very devout actually did not eat on the "Fast Day" but the Kirk Session met and "Purged the Roll", that is, brought the communion roll up to date, and distributed the communion tokens, denying them to anyone who was "debarred from sealing ordinances". At a Kirk Session meeting in 1829 it was decided to order 700 new communion tokens. On this day also, the minister announced the names of young people who were receiving instruction and now had satisfactory Christian knowledge to be admitted to the Lord's Table. In December 1832 23 new communicants were admitted and the following July a further 24.

The communion roll contained a wealth of information: name, address and occupation, previous Kirk membership, attendances at communion services and transfers to other Kirks or date of death. Nurse McFarlane only missed three communions between 1925 and 1955, and Robert Brown, the coal agent from Auldgirth, did not miss any from 1906 to 1918.

In 1882 the Kirk Session had a request from the School Board that the "Fast Day" should be moved to the Friday "Not only that the semi-heathenish custom should be abolished but also that the school attendance of some youths could be increased by two additional days".



A Communion Token for the East Kirk. These were replaced with Communion Cards in 1918

Dunscore Dogs Walkers Take Note!

Heather Sloan

Over the winter an increased level of dog poop being left around the village and along both the Holm Road and School Road has been noticed and commented on by a number of people.

In an effort to promote responsible dog ownership and to encourage people to comply with the current regulations, Fiona Thomson and I have now placed a number of bag dispensers around the village and surrounding roads. The bags are biodegradable and the dispensers will be filled regularly. Let's all work together to keep our village a clean, safe and pleasant place to be for all.

Finally, please remember to take the bag home for safe disposal or place in the nearest public bin. There is no point in bagging the dog mess then using it to decorate the nearest tree. I picked up a bag at the Jane Haining memorial yesterday and have removed a couple from outside the school gates in recent weeks and Fiona has been lifting them from the High Street and Kirkgate.

Thanks Heather, this is a particular bugbear of mine. Why do people go to the bother of bagging the dog muck then hanging it in a tree or chucking it into the ditch? Maybe someone can explain that to me?!



"The Gift - 12 Lessons to Save Your Life" by Edith Eger

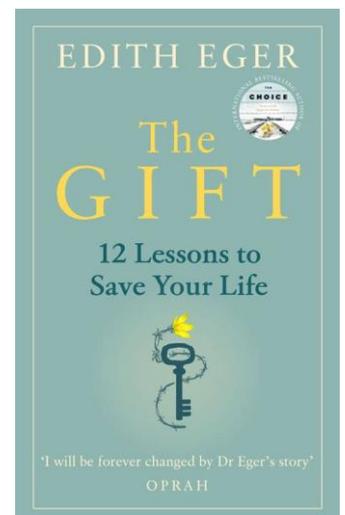
Dr Edith Eger is a Holocaust survivor. In 1944, she was a 16 year old dancer and gymnast living in Kassa, Hungary with her parents and two sisters. In April all the Jews of Kassa were rounded up and imprisoned in an old brick factory. A few weeks later, Edith, her parents and her sister Magda were sent to Auschwitz. Her parents were gassed on arrival and that same evening, Josef Mengele ordered Edith to dance for him. Remembering her mother's advice - "No one can take from you what you've put in your mind", Edith did what she had to do to survive, and danced for her life. When the US military liberated the camps in 1945, she was recovered from a pile of dead bodies, weighing 32kg.

Dr Eger is now 92, living in America and a practicing psychologist. She uses the experiences she gained in the Nazi camps to help other people through trauma and to change destructive behaviours. Recalling her liberation, she says that being released from the Nazis did not mean that she was free - this was just the beginning of a long process of learning to live again. Over 75 years later, she still has nightmares and suffers grief from the loss of her parents, but instead of minimising or trying to forget the past, she believes that the key to survival is in choosing love and hope; "For me, the ability to choose, even in the midst of such suffering and powerlessness, is the true gift that came out of my time in Auschwitz."

The 12 lessons in this book draw on her own life experiences and those of some of her clients. She describes it as being "like the challah my mother used to make for our Friday night meal", with three strands - the story of her survival, the story of healing herself, and the stories of her clients. They lessons cover the different ways in which we are imprisoned, for example, by victimhood, unresolved grief, resentment and lack of forgiveness. Her language is simple and direct: "There is no Prozac at Auschwitz" is the title of a chapter on avoidance; it was over 40 years before Dr Eger could face going back to Auschwitz and to revisit her traumatic past.

It can feel humbling to be offered life advice by a person who has suffered as much as the author of this book, but Dr Eger says "I don't want people to read my story and think, 'There's no way my suffering compares to hers.' I want people to hear my story and think, 'If she can do it, so can I.'"

I wish that before reading "The Gift", I had read Dr Eger's first book, "The Choice", written when she was 90 and telling the story of her life, to give more of her background, but this book is inspiring enough. On the last page, she writes: "We cannot choose to have a life free of hurt. But we can choose to be free, to escape the past, no matter what befalls us, and to embrace the possible. I invite you to make the choice to be free."



Park Plans

Jade Crichton

I was looking to do something about the poor park facilities in the village. After asking advice from the Community Council, I was advised to set up an action group / committee.

I asked some other mums who I'd spoken to about the park if they would like to help with this. Lots of people were interested and thought it was a great idea. I stepped forward to chair the committee and was joined by Carrie Wright as Vice Chair, Carrie McFadzean as Secretary and Caroline Waugh as Treasurer.

I have been in discussions with the Council about funding and plans for the park. The park is owned by the Council and they do not have any funding to offer us for the park but they will carry out the procurement to allow us to save on the VAT.

We are now in the process of getting plans and quotes from three companies which were on the Council's list of accredited contractors. Before we can apply to any organisations for funding they require us to have a plan and quote for the project.

We have had feedback from people in the village via our Facebook page about what they would like to see in the new park. I have also contacted some local teenagers and the Primary School are getting pupils to put on paper what they would like to see in the park.

We hope to provide a park that is inclusive, with something for all ages and abilities that the whole community can enjoy. We have had a quote for drainage work in the field and hope to carry out this first phase of the project in the summer.

Our first fundraiser the Mother's Day raffle was a sell-out and has been such a positive start to our project. We have also had some money donated from a few members of the community. We will continue to update everyone on Facebook with our progress.

Palms in a Poke

Jenny Dobson

It is now over a year since messy church was last held in the church building and, since then, we have been doing our services on Zoom. The pandemic has really tested our abilities in order to provide engaging Messy Church services online.

At Christmas we provided messy Christingle in a bag which went down really well with 55 bags being handed out for people to take part in the Christingle service. As that was such a success, we decided to do Messy Palm Sunday in a bag, where people can order their bags in which all the craft items to take part in the service will be provided (plus a few Easter treats). This format allows us to check in on Messy Church families that haven't been able to join us regularly online and also to reach some families in the area who wouldn't normally take part. Messy Church is for all ages where families can enjoy time together making crafts, singing and listening to stories from the bible.

The main benefit of doing the services on Zoom means that all members of the church including those who wouldn't think about coming to a 'live' Messy Church session in church can see what happens. I think that it's safe to say that they like joining in too! We are very much looking forward to a time when we can meet in person again, whether that will be this year I don't know, but whenever it is, we will enjoy making a joyful noise together again!

Lubuto Update

Aly Robertson

The Zambian church that is twinned with Dunscore and Glencairn and Moniaive churches has a new minister, Rev. Friday Sikonde. Aly contacted Rev. Sinkonde to ask a bit about him.

Have you always been a minister in the United Church of Zambia? I have been a minister since 2001 in this very church, except I served much in rural parts of this country.

Where did you train? I was trained by the same church that time it was the United church of Zambia theological college.



Do you have any family? I am a family man, I am married with four daughters.

What do you see as the priorities of your ministry? I feel that the school needs to be revived, the surrounding communities of Lubuto have a lot of impoverished people because of lack of employment in Zambia and so many people are failing to take their children to school. Since you built us the school we want to take advantage of that and supplements government efforts to enable children have education. I have always enjoyed working with the least members of society to try to improve their standard of living. The issue of transport for the church is affecting vulnerable members more negatively. Whenever there is a funeral most members cannot make it to the grave sites. So acquiring a second, used bus for us would make a difference. Of course not forgetting the core business of spiritual growth!

How is Covid 19 affecting your church life? Covid 19 affects are quite serious on our ministry, Restrictions on worship gatherings have made the church much poorer, Our stipends as ministers have now been delayed, sometimes longer than three months. If you have school-going children then you are in big trouble. Feeding has to been adjusted and that brings mental challenges as the result.

Do you have a favourite football team? I am a Chelsea supporter but for the local teams I support Nkana football team.

Do you have a favourite meal? I am not too selective. I enjoy most foods!

Do you have a favourite hymn? My favourite hymn is 'Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me'.

Community Council Column

Alistair McFadzean

All Community Council meetings have been held by Zoom – thanks to Gavin for arranging that.

We gave £500 towards the Christmas treat for local children with Santa's help and some organization by Laura Creaney.

Gavin stepped down as Vice Chairman for personal reasons – thank you very much Gavin for all your input. Carrie McFadzean is now Vice Chair and Carloine Lester has been co-opted onto the Council.

At our AGM in January, all the office bearers were re-elected.

An Easter Egg hunt is being organized for local children by Chrissy with financial help from the Community Council. Not far short of 100 children have been invited – social distancing will be maintained.

All members of the Community Council are available to discuss any points that the community may wish to raise.

From the Archives

Five Years Ago: Digest Spring 2016

Dunscore Walking Group: Despite a horrendous weather forecast the group continued with the planned coastal walk from Palnackie (had we been going into the hills, the walk would have been cancelled).

Just for fun: How do you think the unthinkable? With an itheberg. Or: I took the shell off my racing snail, thinking it would make him run faster. If anything, it made him more sluggish.

Pylon Plans (by Deborah Galbraith): SPEN, a subsidiary of Scottish Power, plans to install 109 miles of high voltage power lines, pylons and substations across the award winning landscape. Their proposal is hugely controversial and has brought objection from cross party politicians, thousands of residents and environmental organisations. The local campaign group, Dumgal Against Pylons, has outlined an alternative plan. A plan which would meet transmission needs but without sacrificing the region and the people.

Ten Years Ago: Digest Spring 2011

Interview with the Lubuto Coordinator (John Drabble): If you could change one thing about the church or the village, what would it be? I would love to have more young people in church. It would also be great if the church building could be used more as a community resource.

Fairtrade Fortnight (Alison Boyes): There will be a Dunscore Fling where you can visit the homes / studios of local producers and crafts-people to see and buy their wares - from eggs to furniture. On Saturday morning, enjoy a Fairtrade Tea or Coffee in Angel's Corner while looking at jewellery by Joanna Repton and bags by Lizzie Nicholson.

Fairtrade Wine Comes to Dunscore

Matthew Aitken

For many years, it has fallen to me to send in our Fairtrade Village renewal document. I would trawl through our Facebook group and highlight the amazing number of events and activities. Beccy took on the task this year and had a slightly harder job as there has been rather less going on in the past year. Despite that, she did an excellent job because we heard that we remain a Fairtrade Village for two more years.



The assessors made particular mention that we engage successfully with a great number of people and have organised interesting events involving a variety of local organisations.

We are a very active Fairtrade Village and have been delighted to welcome several new people to our, already strong, team. If you have an interest in helping us to promote Fairtrade and local businesses (in many, varied ways) please speak to any one of the group.

We were very sorry not to be able to hold our Big Brew this year (we only just managed to hold it last year before we were locked down!). Despite a lack of Brew, we were determined that we would still mark Fairtrade Fortnight in Dunscore. Anyone who went to Martin's Veg Cabin was able to buy from his amazing selection of fruit and vegetables (check it out – just beyond Mansegate) with a bonus of Fairtrade baking. We sold out – twice! There is still a desire for baking in Dunscore! We organised an “upcycling” activity with anyone who participated receiving a bar of Fairtrade chocolate. And we held a big online Meet the Fairtrade Producer evening when we were joined from South Africa by the lovely people of [Bosman Adama Wines](#).

It was fascinating and illuminating to hear first-hand what a difference Fairtrade makes to the workers there. They are able to decide how to spend the Fairtrade Premium that is a small amount from each bottle of wine sold. They have used it to pay some of the children's school fees, have bought buses to transport the workers and support many of the activities around the business. You can still watch the discussion at this link: <https://youtu.be/Weau-BCCmAQ>.



A group of Bosman vineyard workers' children who benefit from the Fairtrade Premium